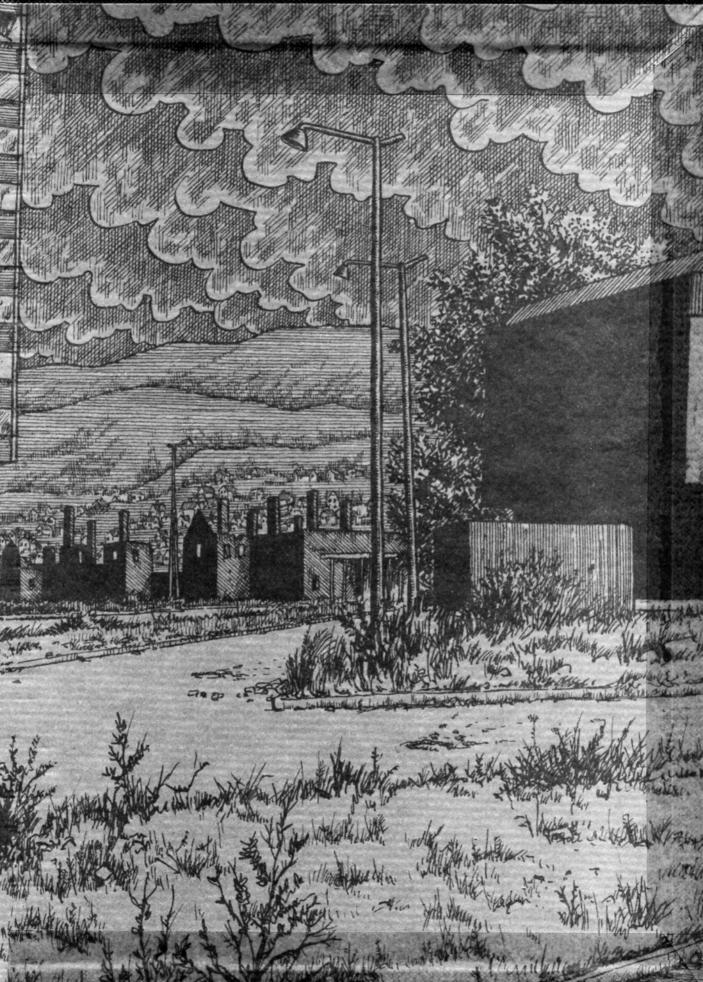
FROM THE AUTHOR OF PALESTINE
JOE SACCO

A STORY FROM SARAJEVO







THE FIXER A STORY FROM SARAJEVO

BY JOE SACCO



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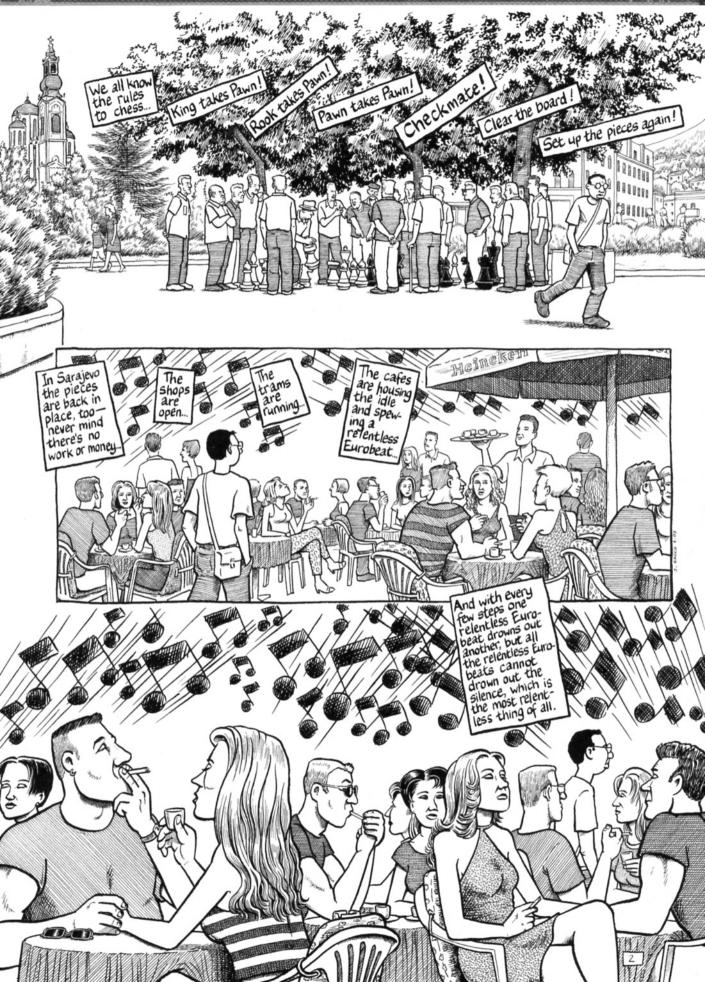
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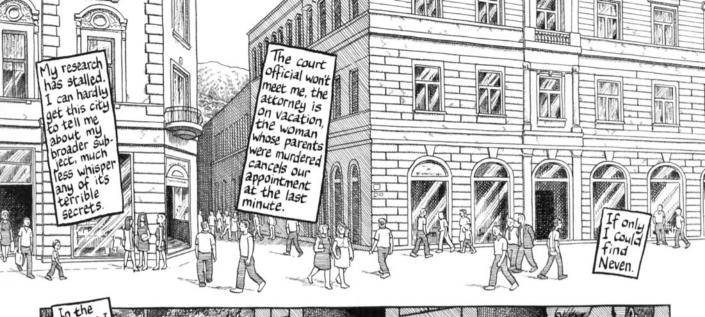
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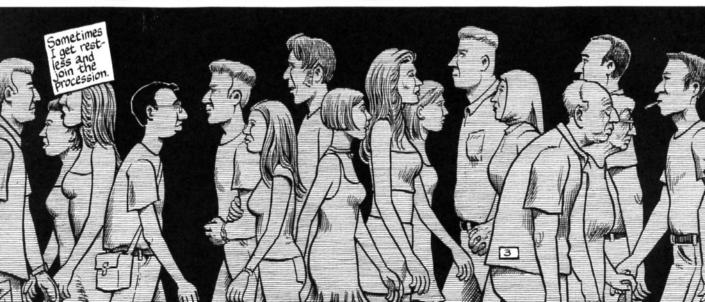


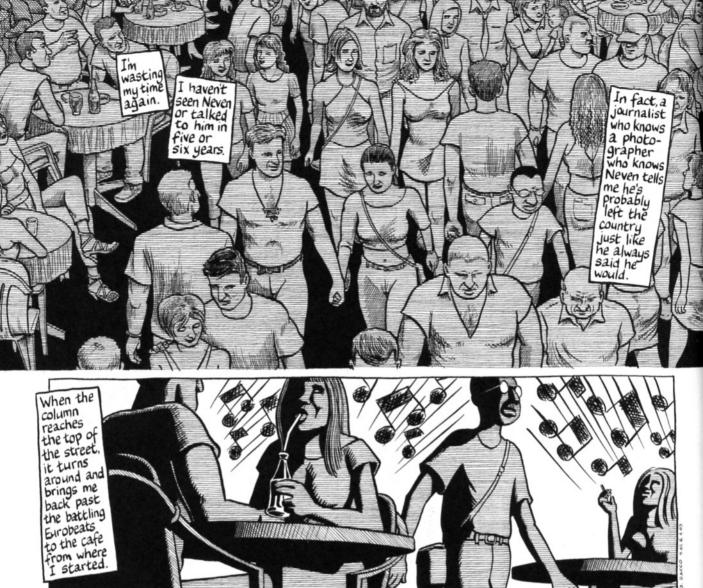






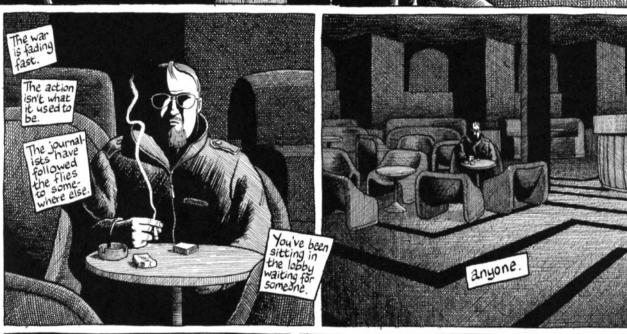




































and then I walk in.







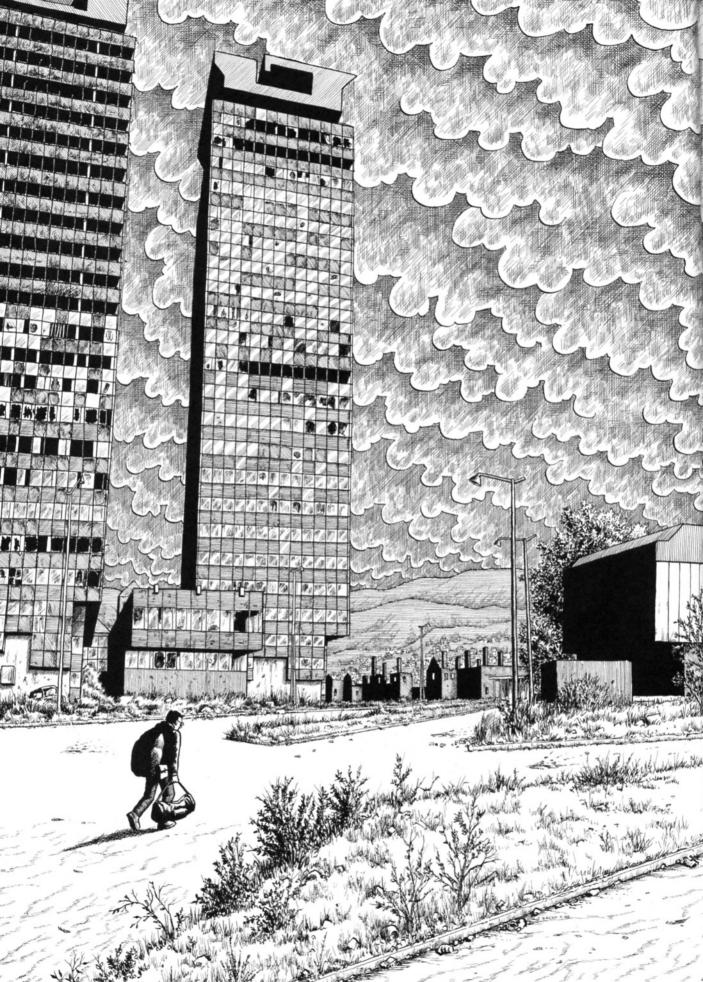




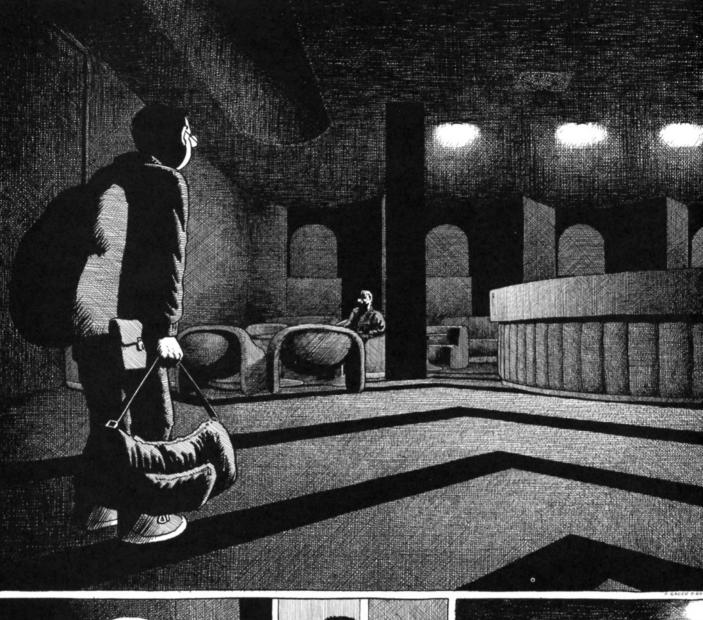




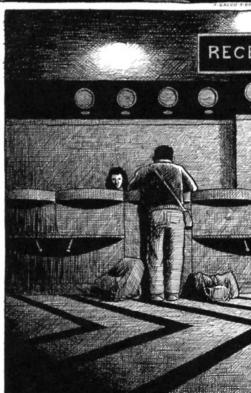












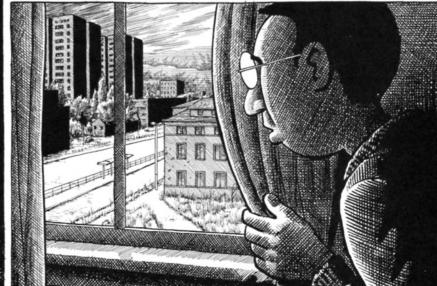


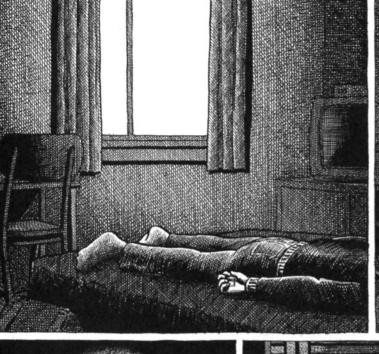


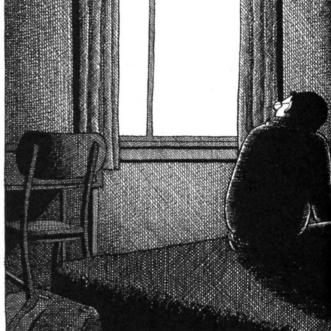




















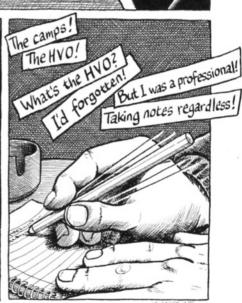








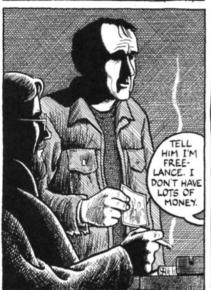


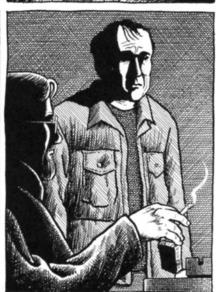






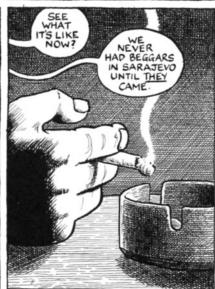


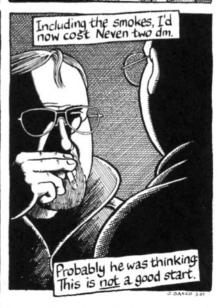


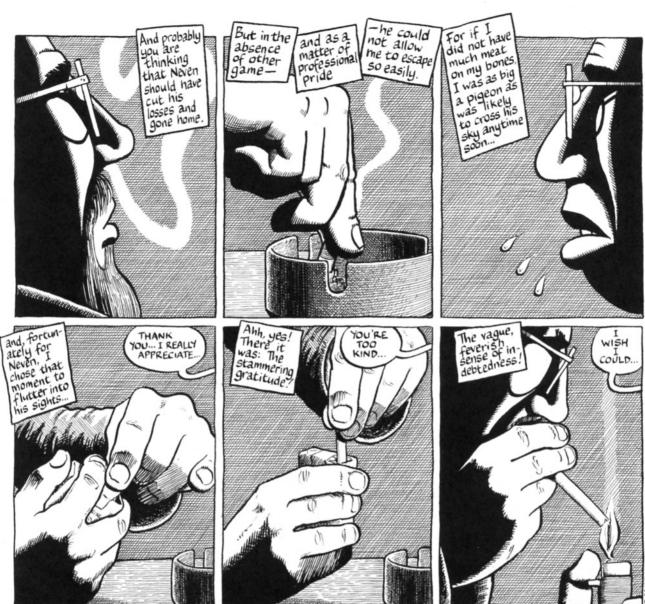




















Back in civilian clothes, you've got some business to take care of. Your brother-you describe him as "a wild sort of guy whose screws were a little bit loose" -crossed the wrong people in Los Angeles and got whacked. You're going to retrace his movements. They begin in Paris.



You get sidetracked there, mixed up with some tough guys from Britain, the States, South Africa, Belgium...





In Marseilles, you and your pals take out a large number of Algerians in a coffee-bar brawl over some girls.



Your gang is noticed and invited to join a larger enterprise.



Now you're dealing guns, selling them to Palestinians.



But the heat is on. Two colleagues are murdered, you think by Mossad.



It's time to clear out of France.

In London you obtain a forged Belgian passport and fly to the States, where there's still that unfinished business.



"As the Bible says, an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth. I went there to kill somebody."

In Los Angeles you discover who ordered your brother



"But I realized I can't play with mean dogs. There was a very slim chance that I'd get my ass out of there alive.



"And I knew that if I got killed, too, my father would be devastated."



You decide to return to Sarajevo and to "start living a decent life."











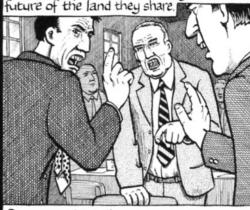






Neighboring Croatia is in the midst of a merciless ethnic war.

In Bosnia, the most ethnically mixed republic, all is seemingly peaceful in the capital Sarajevo while Serb, Muslim, and Croat nationalist politicians heatedly debate the



But something else is going on.

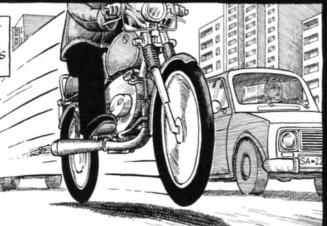
The Muslim nationalist party, the SDA, has learned through its intelligence sources that the Serb nationalist party, the SDS, is organizing paramilitary groups in Bosnia in order to carve out territory, expel non-Serbs, and link up with Serbia proper.



Muslims begin to build their own paramilitary structures, the Patriotic League and the socalled Green Berets, with SDA support.



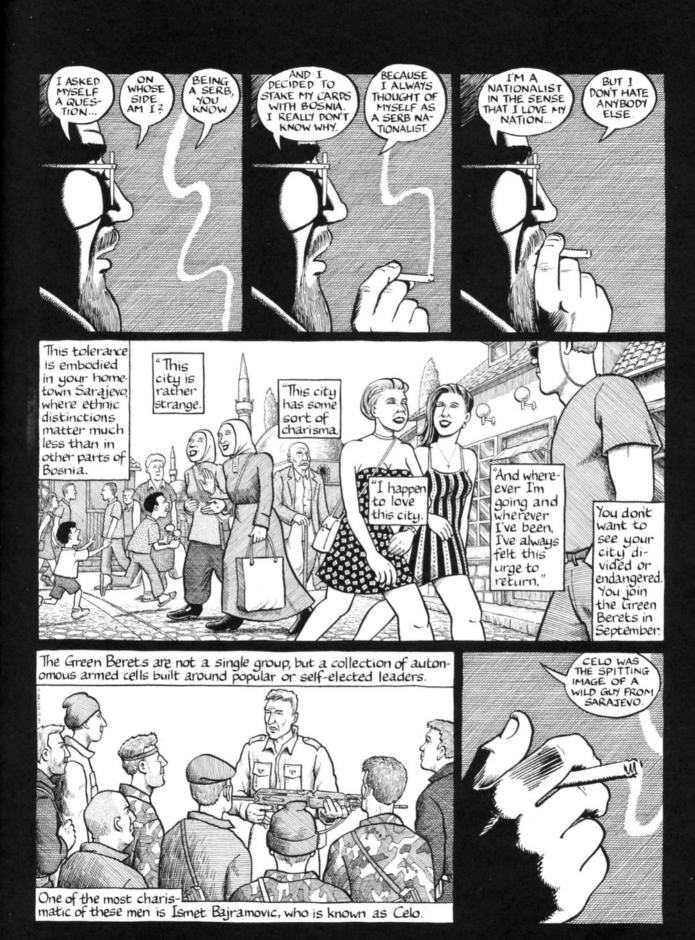
Now put yourself in Neven's shoes.



Your mother is a Muslim, but she left the family when you were eight months old. "She always knew I'm going to be the same sort of punk like my father was," you joke.) Your father is a Serb, and you were raised a Serb.

Some friends of yours, who know about your military skills, ask you to join the Green Berets to help train recruits.







WHEN HE
WAS 19 HE WAS
SENTENCED TO 11
YEARS IN PRISON FOR
ATTEMPTED MURDER,
RAPE, BREAKING AND
ENTERING, BLAH
BLAH BLAH...

OF THAT
I BELIEVE
ONLY THE
CHARGE OF
ATTEMPTED
MURDER

HE WAS SIMPLY TOO GOOD-LOOKING FOR RAPE. Later Bajramovic would claim hed had more than 300 women, that some had even asked him to take their virginity.

According to his own account, in prison Bajramovic earned the respect of the guards and warden by thrashing a



Subsequently, the self-declared "strongest and most popular prisoner" was called upon to resolve disputes between inmates.



Delimustafic, who had turned a chain of kiosks into Cenex, a major trading company, and had reportedly bought his cabinet post, was the richest man in Yugoslavia.



"I collected many debts, but I never used force," Bajramovic claimed later He told those who were slow to pay Delimystafic that "there are other ways to collect payments. And it is interesting that none of them asked me about those other ways.

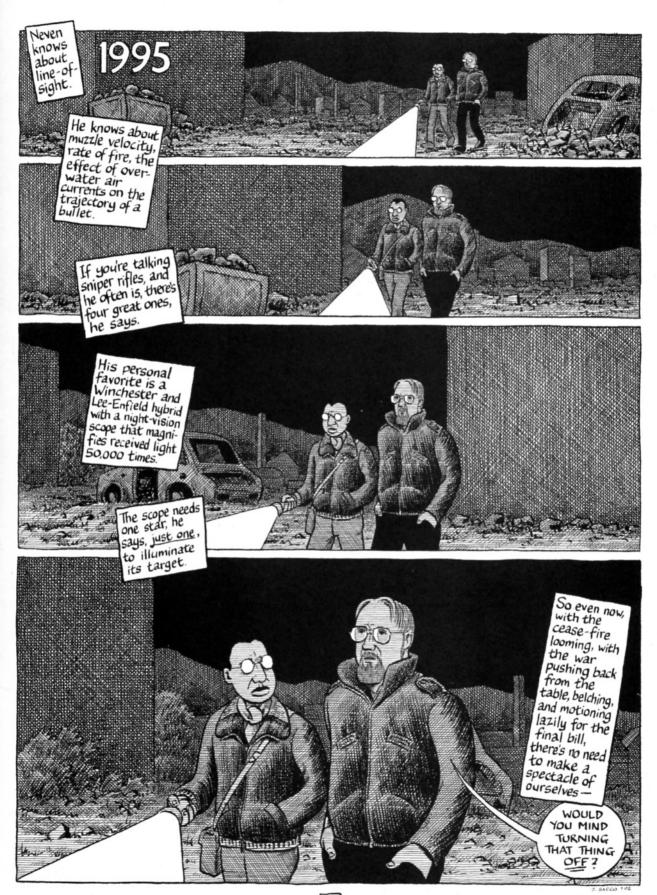


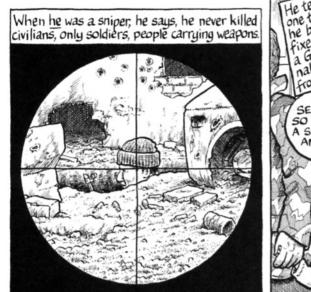




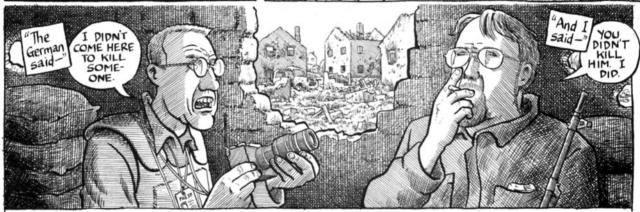
"He had a sort of aura, a sort of aura, a sort of natural born sense of leadership," you say.
"That's why people with better education, people like me, for instance, were following guys like that."













*CHETNIK - A PEROG-ATORY EXPRESSION FOR A SERB NATIONALIST

1940.

GLIDERS

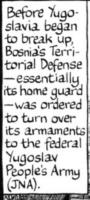
MASTER-

PIECE





Who will defend Sarajevo?





Now, as the war begins, the JNA puts hundreds of tanks and artillery pieces into the hands of the rebel Serbs. Against this overwhelming firepower, the Bosnian government must build an army almost from scratch.

In the meantime, ordinary citizens of Sarajevo, with whatever weapons they have, organize themselves into units by apartment block or neighborhood.

The police and its special units, the equivalent of SWAT teams, provide more mobile forces, but they have been reduced by significant defections—many Serb police have gone over to the



They will defend, but only their own houses, their own streets.

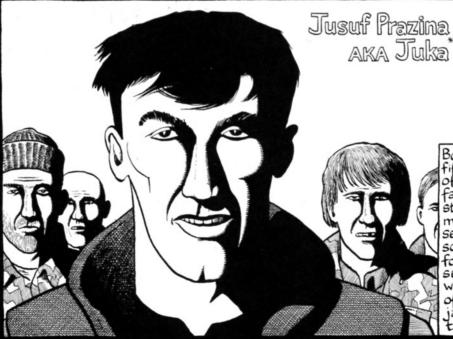




In those first few weeks the Bosnian government makes its first attempt to form a unified command from the official and autonomous units active in Sarajevo.



Other larger, more powerful paramilitary units are incorporated into the govern-ment's nascent military struc-ture. These units are led by figures, often with petty criminal backgrounds, who would soon become, like Celo Bajramovic, military pop idols. Three in particular would make a lasting impression on Sarajevo:



Born in 1967... fifth child of a poor family... he studied medicine in secondary school... then found himself on the wrong side of the law... jailed five times...



I WASN'T AN INTIMATE FRIEND, BUT I KNEW HIM.

WE WERE
GREETING
EACH OTHER
ON THE STREET
OCCASIONALLY;
WE WOULD HAVE
A DRINK OR
TWO.

IT WAS
THE SORT
OF RELATIONSHIP WHERE YOU
DON'T FUCK WITH
ME, I DON'T FUCK
WITH YOU,
WE'RE
OKAY.

"Before the war he was known as a tough guy. He started an agency called Green Berets, a debt enforcement agency. And he was always boasting that he actually gave the name to the loaramilitary! Green Berets"



Juka was severely wounded in a prewar shootout and otherwise battered. One of his legs had been shattered and one of

When the war began his troops, known as the Wolves, fought hard, and Juka developed a glamorous reputation as a war-time commander...





HE HAD MORE THAN 3,000 PEOPLE. THAT'S A CON-SIDERABLE FORCE IN ANY WAR. "His people were loyal to him mostly because he took good care of them. He saw that they were well fed, that they were well armed, to the best of his abilities, that they had ammunition."



Musan Topalovic aka Caco*



I KNEW CACO BUT I WASN'T CLOSE...

> SEVERAL TIMES HE INVITED ME IN-TO HIS HOUSE. TO HAVE A COFFEE.

He was not a criminal before the war but a folk musician...as conflict with rebel Serbs seemed imminent, he organized an elite Green Beret unit called Bosna 10.

His unit, incorporated into the army as the Tenth Mountain Brigade, was responsible for one of the most dangerous and strategic front lines, on Trebevic Mountain, immediately above his stronghold in Sarajevo's Bistrik neighboral hood.









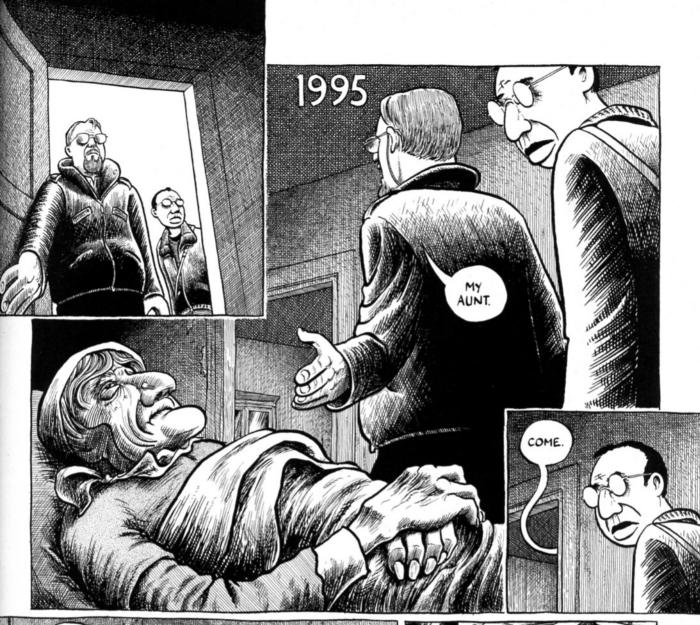










































In May 1992, the first warning goes out. Bosnian army Colonel Jovan Divjak sends a letter to President Alija Izetbegovic outlining the looting and other illegal activities carried out by the paramilitary forces—now troops and police technically under government control. In 2001 Divjak tells me:

AND THE
PRESIDENT REPLIED THAT IT'S
NORMAL IN ANY
WAR THAT THESE
THINGS HAPPEN.

The quasi warlords are making their own rules. They raid food and department stores to fill their warehouses.



sold on the black market or distributed among supporters to consolidate their power bases.



The strongmen have their own take on these matters. Ramiz Delalic - the other Celo will later explain, "... I took money from private businessmen... because we created the conditions for them to work. I never forced them to give us money. I never said, You must!



Apartments are expropriated and given to followers. Conveniently, those forced to vacate are often non-Muslims. In 1995. on the Serb side of the lines, I meet one elderly couple—he is a Croat, she a Serb – who fled their richly furnished Flat after being visited by Juka's men nine times.



"They came with guns, and they said they were looking for weapons. They went through everything.



"Eventually someone who knew what was going on... warned us to leave. We left with the clothes on our back."

Later they learned that Juka's men had distributed their belongings and installed refugees from Gorazde in their flat.



In a city that is cut off and being starved into submission, some strongmen continue to live large. According to Divjak, when Juka's wife gave birth and Juka wanted to celebrate, he threw a huge party featuring some of Sarajevo's most popular singers and gave out 80 bottles of whisky."



Well, you may ask yourself, why not? Shouldn't those defending the city have their privileges? For example, put yourself in Neven's shoes.



and Celo's men take what you want from those things that are "bound to spoil," what's wrong with that?"





Celo is also distributing money to his soldiers, probably cash left by Delimusta-fic though you "can't vouch for that."

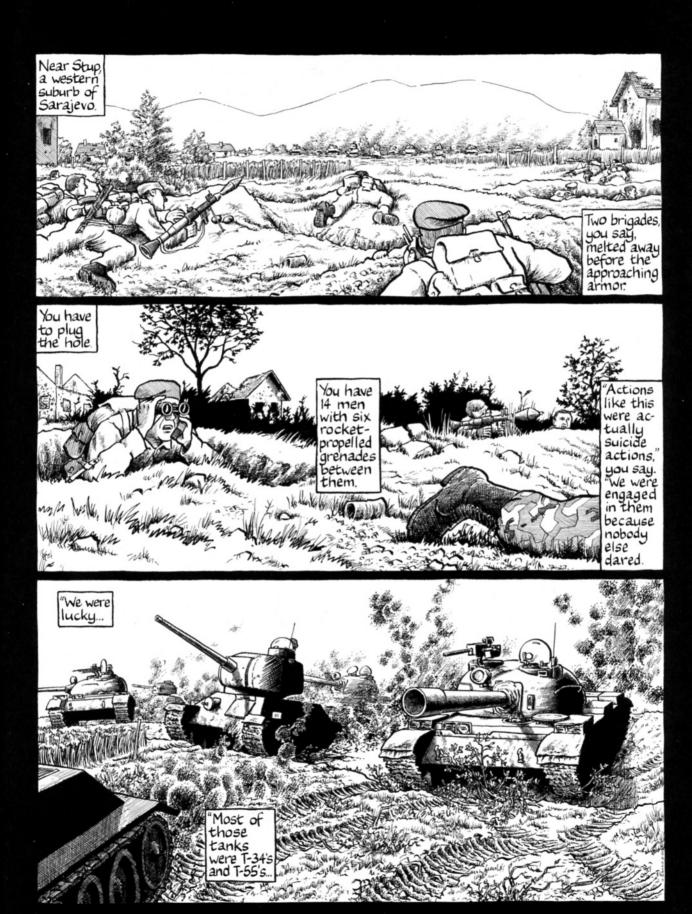




"We were living at our headquarters, but we were free to go home whenever we wanted. And most of us had Motorola radios so we could be summoned. There was a list of our addresses -our apartments, our girlfriends; second girl-friends; third girl-friends; and so on - and the driver would come and pick us up. If there was an emergency, they'd

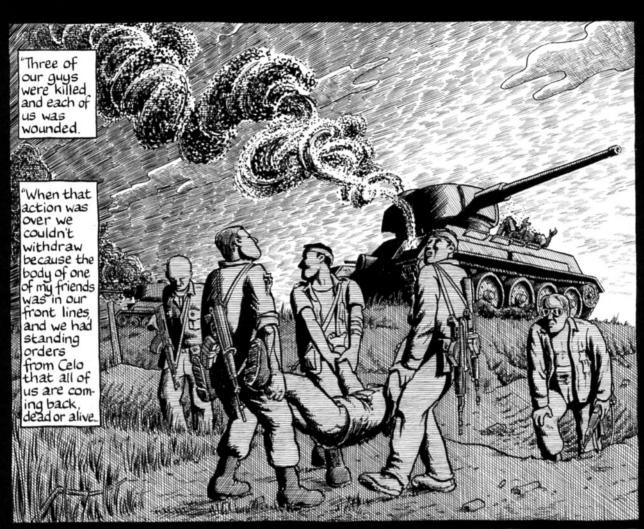
Find us.



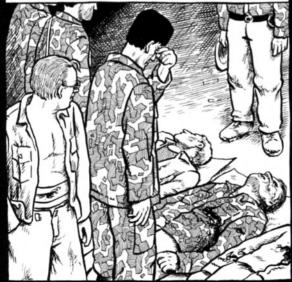








"And that cult of Celo is based on the fact that he's a cruel son of a bitch, which is completely untrue. Because I saw him crying when Slaven was killed.







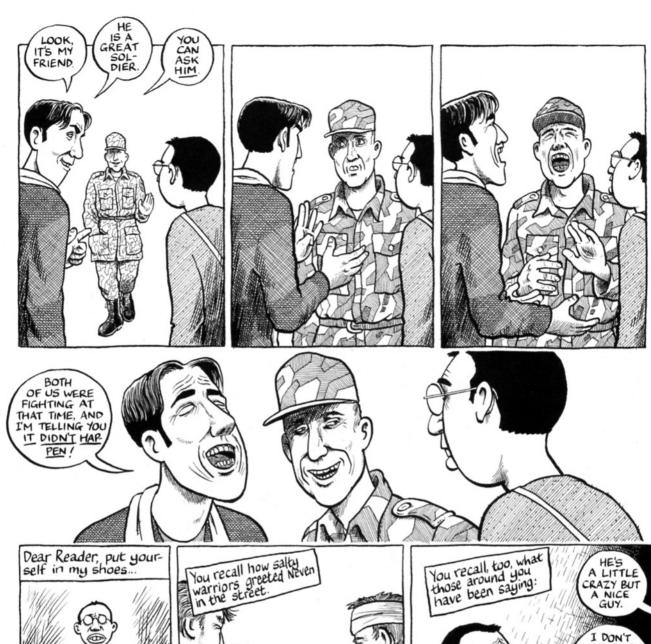


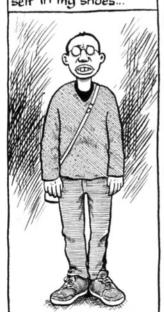














Plant Control of the Control of the

I DON'T LIKE GUYS LIKE THAT, BUT HE'S A TOWER OF INFORMA-TION.

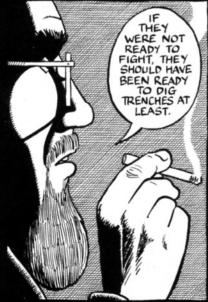
THE
WAY HE TALKS
MAKES IT SOUND
LIKE HE'S KILLED
HUNDREDS OF
CHETNIKS. I BET
HE'S KILLED
NO ONE.

HE'S PROBABLY GOING TO GET HIMSELF KILLED SOON.





"There were a lot of people who didn't want to join the army, which is fine by me because you can't use people like that in a real action... But while we were fighting they were sitting in their warm houses..."



"If someone had to dig, it was much easier from a commander's point of view to sacrifice civilians than soldiers.



"Everybody should take some risk".



"I would go into a coffee bar, order myself a coffee or whisky.



"Then I would tell the bar owner—

STOP
THE
MUSIC

"—and I would order every male in the bar to get out and enter one of our vans.



"And off for four,"
five, seven days, no problems."

NOW, WHEN THEY'RE DOING IT OFFICIALLY, THEY TAKE PEOPLE FOR 21 DAYS. IN ONE SHIFT.

WERE
THESE MEN
ALLOWED
TO NOTIFY
THEIR FAMILIES?

"If they had a chance to notify their families—. Everyone has somebody well connected, and then we would receive an official



"Our approach to the problem was a rather democratic one."

Shirkers of military service are not the only ones conscripted by groups like Celo's for trench digging duty. Intellectuals and artists are taken, too. One soldier enjoys telling me how he had personally rounded up a well known theater director for Caco's Dig For Victory campaign.



I meet one young woman whose father simply disappeared one day. Not her mother nor anyone else knew where he was. The police couldn't or wouldn't help.



He turned up ten days later, swollen from



"He had lost ten kilos," she tells me. "He had been accused of something, and Juka's men had taken him to dig trenches.







I meet her father several times. Im told he was different before...talka-



He is a Serb, and his victimization epitomized the fraying of Sarajevo's civil, ethnically tolerant society.



As shells and bullets wiped out scores of Sarajevans, who would care much about a disappeared Serb?





Juka's personal heroics and T.V. appearances have transformed the onetime petty crook into an icon. Juka is highly regarded, even by educated Sarajevans be-cause the fact that someone —anyone— would have the auts to stand up and fight was really appreciated, according to Vildana Selimbegovic, a jour-nalist for 'Dani'

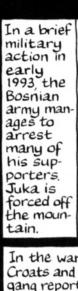










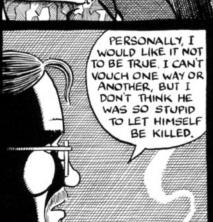




In the war within a war that erupts between the Bosnian Croats and Bosnian government in 1993, Juka's shrinking gang reportedly aids in the cleansing of Muslims from Mostar.

Shortly thereafter, Juka leaves the Balkans. In December 1993, hitchhikers find his body at a rest stop near Liege, Belgium.





















S.D.A. - THE MUSLIM NATION-ALIST PARTY



"I never allowed people to mention that Serbs are shooting on Sarajevo. I was always insisting that <u>Chetniks</u> are shooting on Sarajevo. Because I couldn't fight against Serbs. I <u>can</u> fight against Chetniks.

"He told me I couldn't be in the active unit. I could be on the operational





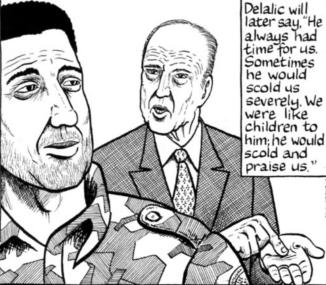
Put yourself in Neven's shoes. You have health problems. You've been wounded three times. Legally you can have yourself demobilized. So you do.



"I thought I'd done enough. I did more than some people who were fitter than I am so why the hell would I play the fool anymore?



Meanwhile. the Bosnian government is increasingly at a loss as to how to deal with its ill-disciplined military units. For his part, President Izetbegovic seems to tolerate the excesses of commanders like Delalic and Caco



According to Divjak, by this time a general, "Izetbegovic believed more in them than in the official commanders of the army of Bosnia."



(In fact, Delalic and Caco were official commanders, technically answerable to the government.)

Put yourself in Izetbegovic's shoes. Although newly trained army units are shouldering more of the burden, the brigades commanded by Caco and Defalic are still vital to the defense of Sarajevo.



The government continues to make efforts to integrate all brigades properly into the chain of command. Some of the smaller warlords acquiesce.

But Delalic, who previously accepted the officers the high command sent to his 9th Motarized Brigade—including a commander superior to himself—now chases them away.



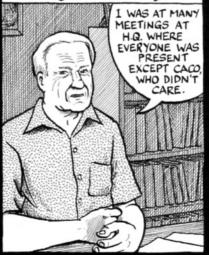


He later explains that "they never asked about anything else but where their offices are. I told them, 'Your offices are in the forest.'"

Caco ignores the army reorganization entirely.



According to General Divjak-



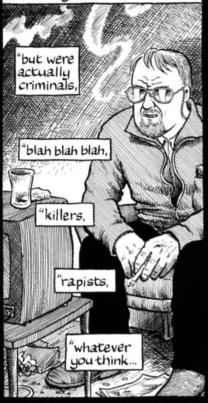
The government turns its attention to Ismet Bajramovic—Celo—whose unit it declares a rogue.



"On the 15th of April, '93, there was a special show on television ... and the president himself said certain elements of the military police commanded by Celo were not really soldiers,

"We were accused of breaking and entering,

"We were stunned by it. How else can you feel when you've lost so many friends and someone is saying you were not a soldier but a fucking criminal?



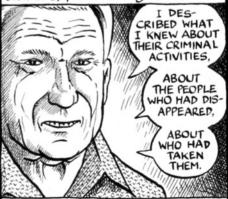




Celo's unit is disbanded, its men dispersed into other units. Celo, who the war has made rich, opens up a nightclub.

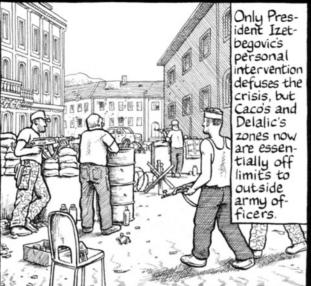


Meanwhile, damning evidence is mounting against the other warlords. In May, General Divjak sends a letter to President Izet-begovic with detailed charges—including accusations of murder of citizens, particularly Serbs.



But Izetbegovic won't upset his accommodation with the strongest of the strongmen until they threaten his authority or undermine the state.

That moment seems to come in July when the government arrests Caco's chief of staff, who is sometimes blamed for certain excesses attributed to Caco. In response Caco throws up barricades and takes hostages. Delalic lines up behind him. The stage is set for a confrontation between the government and two of its most powerful brigade commanders



According to 'Dani' journalist Vildana Selimbegovic-

THE HIGHER
ECHELON WAS
AFRAID TO GO
THERE BECAUSE
THEY RAN THE
RISK OF BEING
HUMILIATED BY
CACO OR HIS
TROOPS.

THEY DIDN'T REALLY HAVE THE GUTS TO GO THERE.

Caco in particular puts himself further and further above the law.

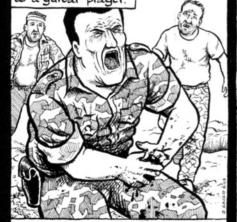


HE SNAPPED WHEN HE LOST HIS FINGERS

"He was shooting a nitroglycerin gun. The gun malfunctioned, and the explosion took off three of his fingers.



"You can imagine what that means to a guitar player.



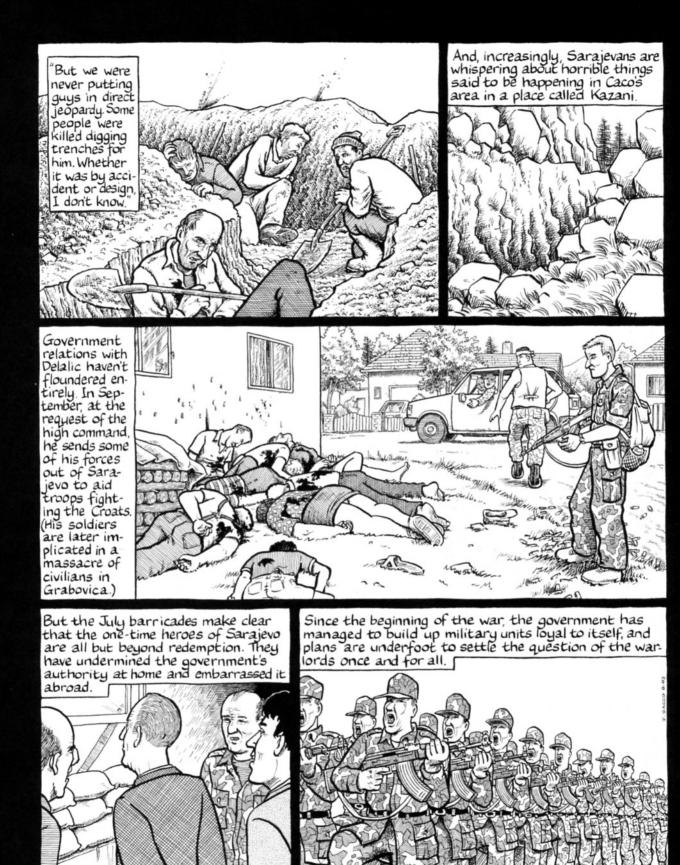
"Music was his whole life.

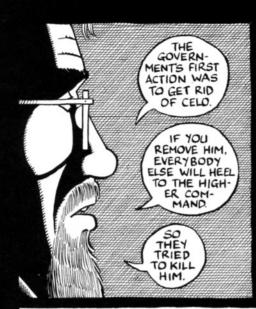
"He changed. That's beyond question...That must have affected his command abilities."

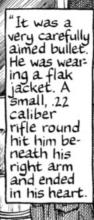


HE WAS TAKING PEOPLE FROM THE STREETS AND MAKING THEM DIG TRENCHES

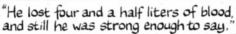










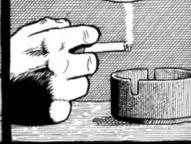




THEY SAID THAT THE BULLET CAME FROM EN EMY POSITIONS WHICH WERE 1,200 METERS FROM THAT PLACE



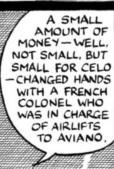
IF SOME-ONE CAN EXPLAIN TO ME HOW A .22 CALIBER BULLET CAN TRAVEL 1,200 METERS, I WILL KISS HIS ASS IN WASHINGTON SQUARE AT WHAT-EVER TIME HE CHOOSES.



In fact, in 2001 Munir Alibabic, who in 1993 was Bosnia's intelligence services chief in Sarajevo, as well as a top police official, tells me he learned the attempted assassination-

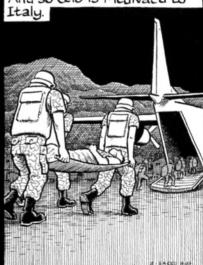


The Seva was a notorious paramilitary group established by the Interior Ministry





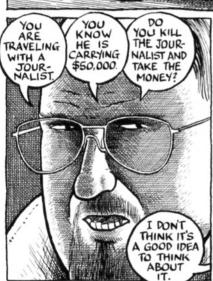
And so Celo is Medivac'd to





































According to Alibabic, the intelligence boss and police chief at the time, "A plan was put together to get rid of the criminal indi-

I PARTICIPATED IN THE
PLAN, WHICH
INVOLVED A
COMBINATION
OF MILITARY
FORCES AND
POLICE OF-

FICERS

viduals..." F

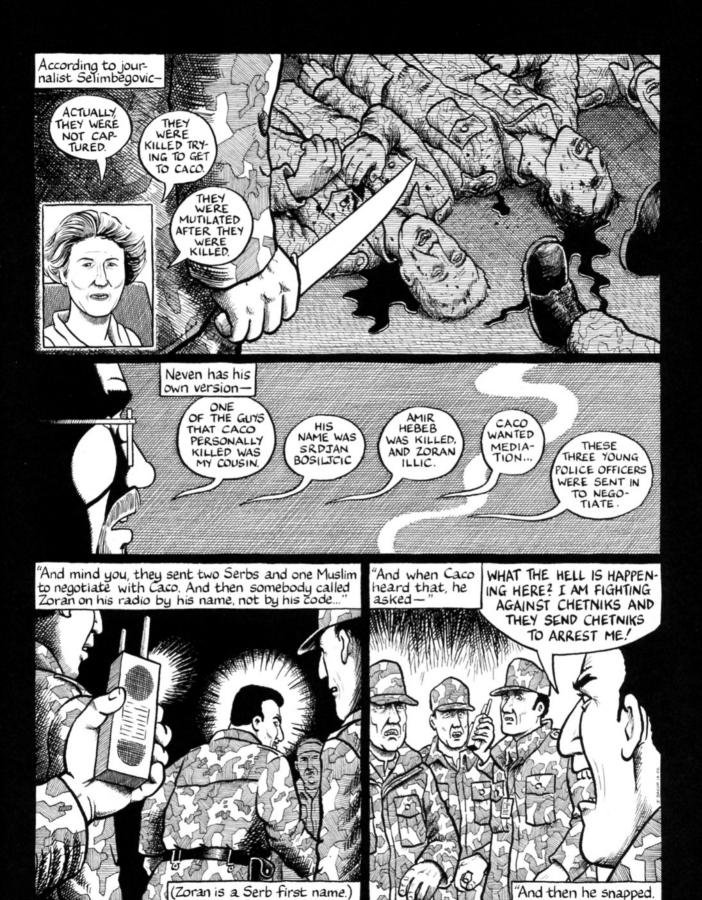
THE
PLAN WAS TO
BESIEGE THEM,
TO MAKE THE
NOOSE TIGHTER,
AND THEN TO
ARREST THEM.

When he sees his headquarters has been surrounded by soldiers and police, Delalic takes hostages.



After a brief firefight and a call to President Izetbegovic, however, he gives himselfup.





"He killed Zoran with a knife.



"He threw Amir through a window.



"And he shot Srdjan."



I'M TELLING YOU HOW IT WAS.

FOR SURE THIS IS FROM A CERTIFIED SOURCE. Caco has seized hostages and threatens to kill them if the military and police don't lift their siege.



Finally, President
Izetbegovic guarantees Caco fair
treatment, and he surrenders.

Several hours later Caco is dead. Officially, he has been killed. trying to escape. But most Sarajevans believe something else—



They believe he was kicked to death by the father of one of the policemen he had killed.

Alibabic has his own theory-

HE WAS THE EX-ECUTOR AND WITNESS OF ATROCITIES AND KILLINGS. HE WAS IN THE CHAIN OF COMMAND. AND HE NEEDED TO DIS-APPEAR

WITHOUT HIS
DEATH THE
ONES WHO
KILLED HIM
WOULD ALSO
HAVE BEEN HELD
RESPONSIBLE.

"He was killed because he was a dangerous witness for



Fourteen people were killed in the operations against Caco and Delalic. Almost 200 of their men were arrested.

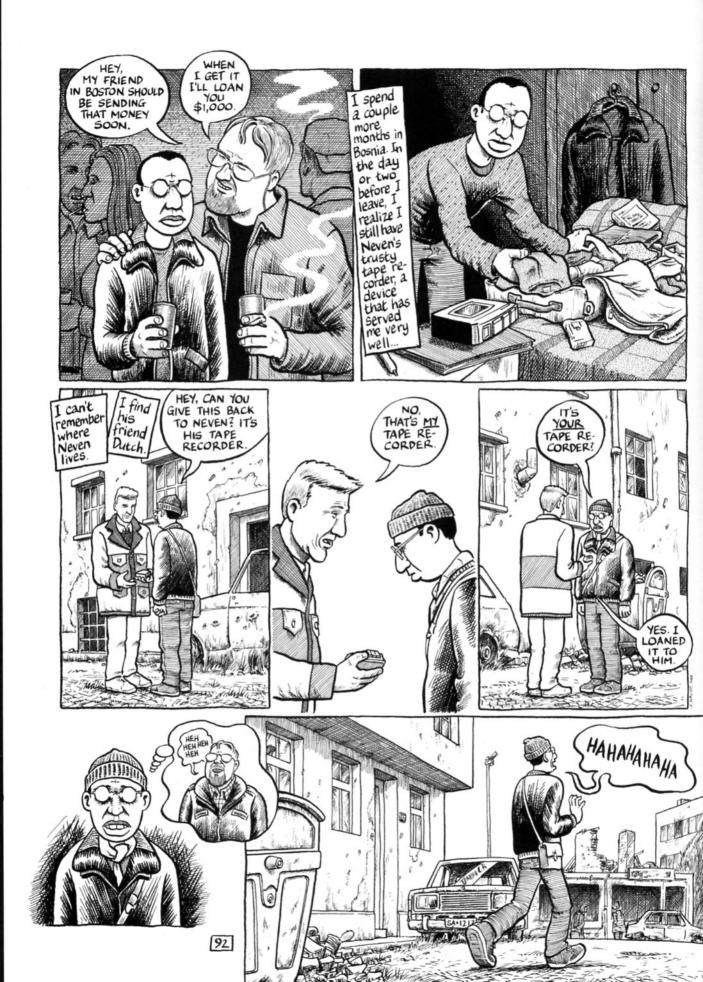


fenders of Sarajevo were finished.











In the hours after his death, the government, which had long needed Caco and — many believed — was well aware of his crimes, washes its hands of him.

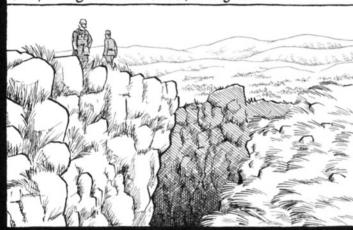


It heaps charges on his stiffening corpse: murder; rape; the kidnap of wealthy Sarajevans for ransom; blackmail; forcing civilians to dig trenches; and the seizure of U.N. vehicles.

XXWM.

The government reveals it has found a secret burial ground, the Kazani pit, which had been in Caco's zone of control and where he is said to have dumped his victims, mainly Serb citizens of Sarajevo.

Many followers and admirers of Caco still do not believe that he had anything to do with the crimes attributed to him.





WHOEVER
SAYS CACO
WAS KILLING
PEOPLE JUST
BECAUSE THEY
WERE SERBS
HE IS
LYING.

I'M READY TO SAY THAT TO ANYBODY'S FACE.

Caco's body is buried in a secret location, but in a move that shocks many, especially his victims, the government reinters his remains in Sarajevo's main military cemetery in November 1997. His public funeral is attended by thousands, including Bakir Izetběgovic, the son of the president.

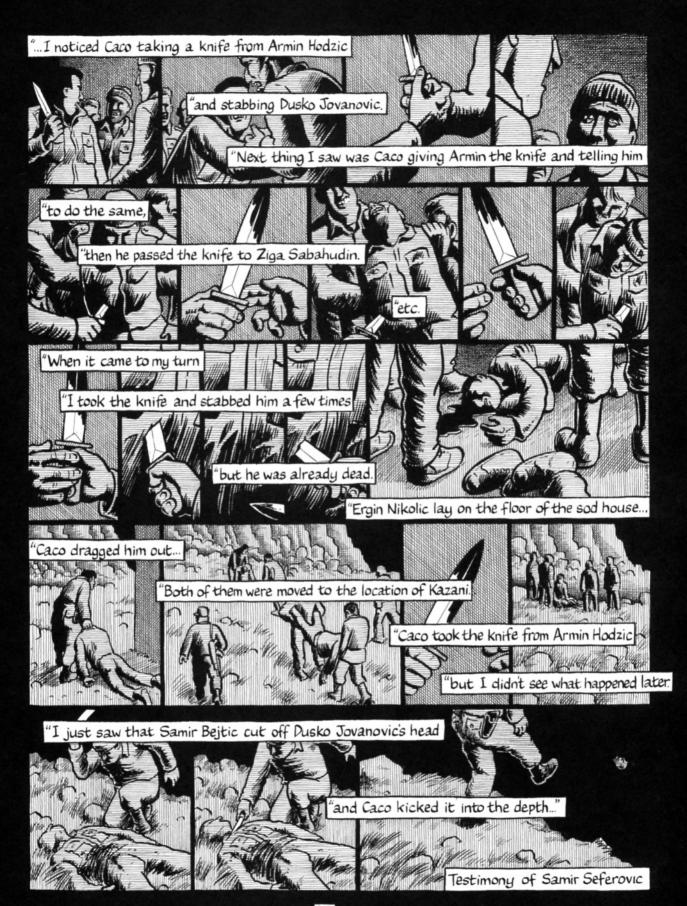


That same month, 'Dani magazine prints testimony from the 1994 closed-door military trial of a number of Caco's sol diers. A sample of the testimony appears on the following two pages.



"I don't know who threw the bodies into the depth.







assaulting a police officer.

he is in jail for murder.

ordered to receive psychiatric treatment





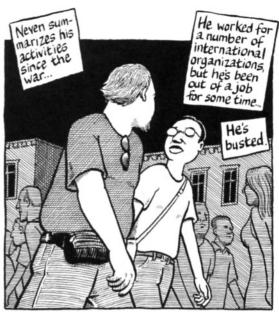
I discover he'd worked for the international police force, which gives me his old number:



But when I call, the person on the other end says he hasn't seen Neven in six months...



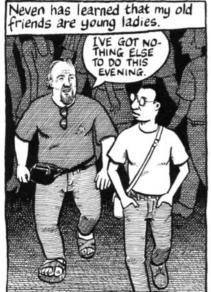












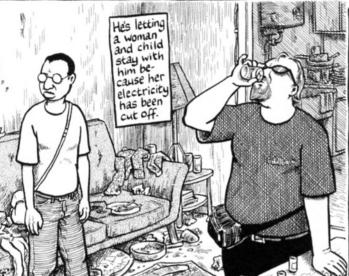






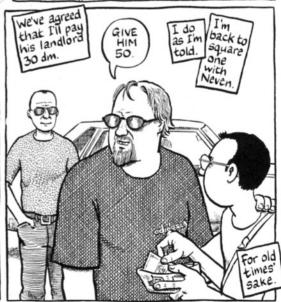














He promised to prepare some inside interviews for me, but he has prepared nothing. While we're drinking coffee, he pulls over a pal from the next table, who, needless to say, has little of interest to tell me.





At lunch, I ask about his old pals Dutch and Senad, with whom he once dreamed of opening up a coffee ban

I DON'T TALK TO DUTCH. HE OWES ME 6,000 DM He says he helped Dutch find a job... but now that Neven's fallen on hard times, Dutch hasn't even bothered to ask how he's doing. And things are strained with Senad, too.



He was away from Sarajevo for two days, he says, and when he got back he found a politically connected "bastard" had simply seized the flat.

ekeni

I WAS
LIVING IN
THAT APARTMENT SINCE I
WAS FOUR
DAYS OLD.

MEDIE LATER



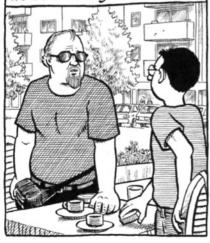








He's supposed to take me on Part Two of his guided tour, but I excuse him. Forget it, Neven.



Goodbye. Take care of yourself.

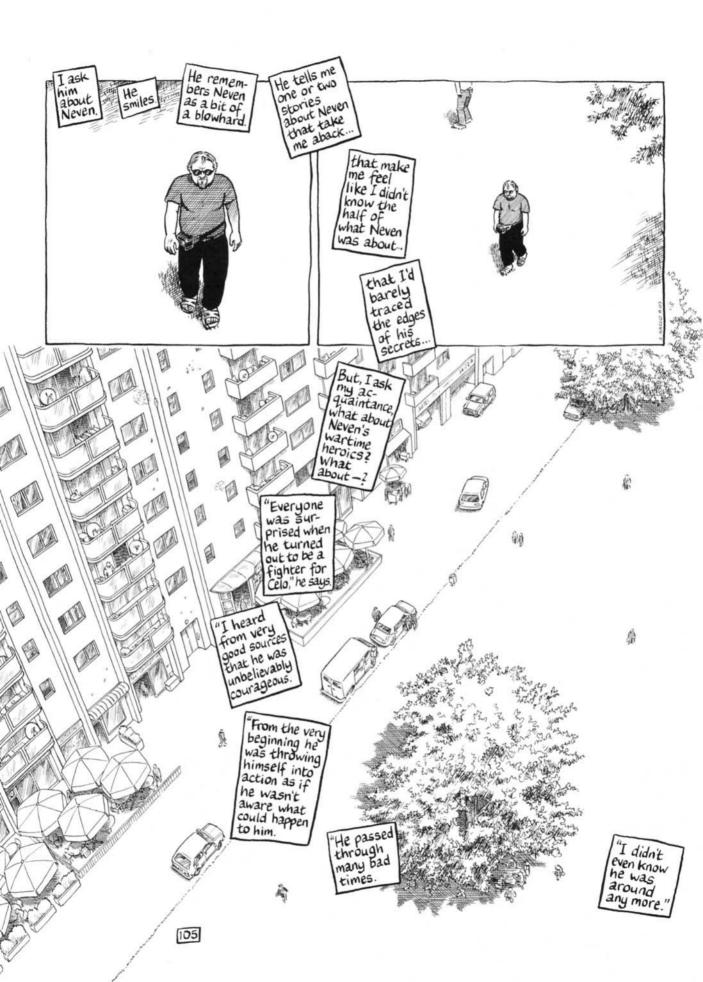


He walks back to where his pals are playing cards.



And I go see someone who knew Neven well, someone whose opinion I trust.

J. SACCO B.O.



LAST WORDS

A NOTE ON THE TWO CELOS

As indicated in the book, two of Sarajevo's warlords—**Ismet Bajramovic** and **Ramiz Delalic**—were nicknamed Celo. To avoid too much confusion, I usually refer to Ismet Bajramovic (who is central to Neven's story) as Celo, and I usually refer to Ramiz Delalic by his last name. During the war, however, most Sarajevans were apt to think of Delalic, who had a larger unit and was around longer, when someone mentioned the name Celo.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First off, great thanks to the **John Simon Guggenheim Memorial Foundation** for providing a grant which got me back to Bosnia for additional research and bought me the time needed to produce this book.

In Sarajevo, special thanks to my old pal Edin Culov for helping out with translations at interviews and to Lejla Efendic for translating Bosnian-language articles into English. Thanks also to the staff at Dani magazine, particularly Senad Pecanin and Vildana Selimbegovic, who were always helpful to me during the war and upon my return visit. Dani was my primary source for the histories of the various warlords and most of the quotes attributed to them. Thanks to those few among Sarajevo's former police and army officials who took the time to answer my questions, namely Munir Alibabic and Josan Divjak. Thanks also to Ferida Durakovic, Ivana Sekularac, Srdjan Vuletic, and Alma Mirvic. In New York City, thanks to my other old pal Soba for all that last-minute help tracking down photos and information.

Thanks also to **Chris Oliveros**, Drawn & Quarterly publisher, for being patient while I stretched out the deadline for this book. He is a very easy man to work for.

Finally, the most thanks to Neven. Good luck to you always.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

JOE WAS BORN IN MALTA IN 1960. He moved around the world to Australia, before settling in Los Angeles in 1972. As a child he vividly remembers buying war comics and Mad magazine 1950s reprints. He studied at the University of Oregon and graduated with a degree in journalism in 1981. That same year he received his first rejection slip from RAW that noted his strip had "almost been published."

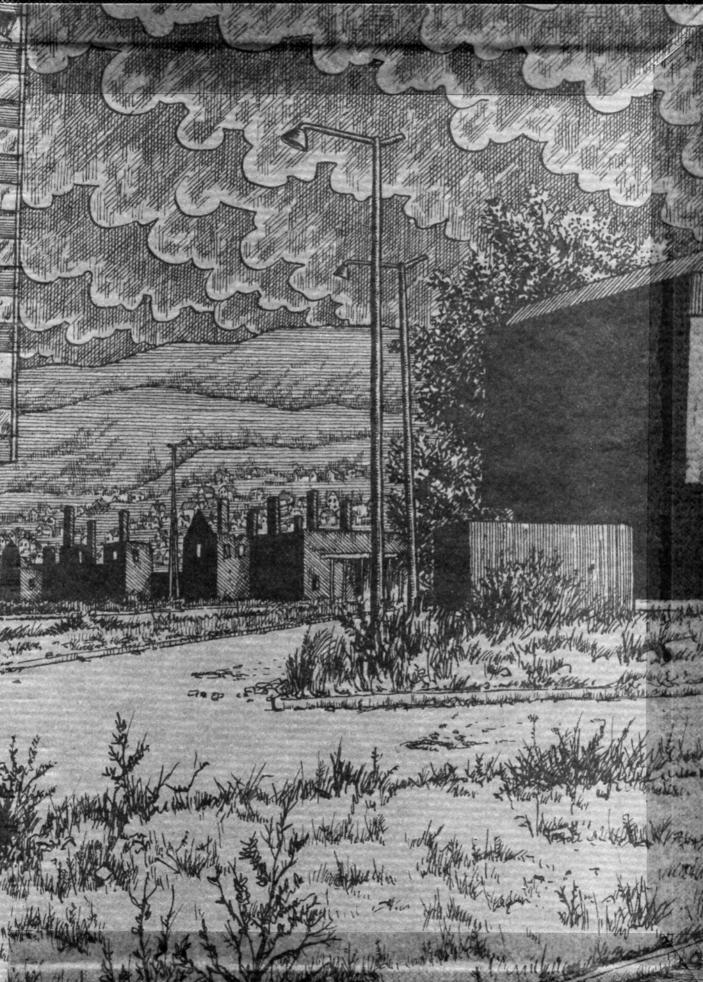
Joe continued to travel extensively in the 1980s, living in Europe and Malta. He worked as a cartoonist and editor for various presses, including The Comics Journal.

Joe traveled to the Middle East for the first time in 1991 and came away from Israel and the Occupied Territories with the material that would make up his groundbreaking comic book series **Palestine** (1995, Fantagraphics). Sacco was the recipient of the prestigious American Book Award in 1996 for **Palestine**.

In 1995, just prior to the end of the Bosnian War, Sacco traveled to Sarajevo and its surrounding areas. There he began his book **Safe Area Gorazde** (2000, Fantagraphics), a fierce condemnation of the political impotence and badly planned UN operations during the Bosnian conflict. He continues to travel to and write about the situation in Bosnia. He has an infrequent series called **Stories from Bosnia** with D&Q.

Joe's work has been exhibited at art galleries and universities around the world, and he has lectured on political conflict, journalism, and the art of comics.





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